

Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 263808

EXDIS MILITARY ADDRESSES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

FOLLOWING REPEAT DAMASCUS 2843 ACTION SECSTATE INFO
AMMAN BEIRUT CAIRO TEL AVIV JERUSALEM NEW YORK 29 NOVEMBER.

QUOTE

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 2843

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS USCINCEUR

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SY
SUBJECT: SARG SUSPECTS IRAQI SPONSORSHIP OF TUNISIAN HIJACKING
AND BOMBINGS IN DAMASCUS

REF: AMMAN 6828

1. APPRECIATED RECEIVING AMB PICKERING'S REFTEL RELAYING
GOJ REPORTS ON SUBVERSION AND DISAFFECTION IN SYRIA.
HAVE BEEN ABLE DEVELOP SOME FURTHER DETAILS ON TWO OF
INCIDENTS REPORTED THEREIN.

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2. AS REPORTED DAMASCUS 2671 (NOTAL), BOMB EXPLODED AGAINST BRANCH OFFICE OF SYRIAN G-2 NOV 13. THIS WAS FIFTH IN SERIES OF BOMBINGS IN DAMASCUS AND ALEPPO SINCE EARLY AUGUST. I ASKED COS SHIHABI NOV 27 ABOUT STORY OF PALESTINIANS FIRING ON VEHICLES ALONG DAMASCUS-MEZZE ROAD NOV 13 WHICH ALLEGEDLY OCCURRED IN CONJUNCTION BOMBING OF G-2.

3. CAUTIONING THAT ONE MUST NOT CREDIT ALL RUMORS AVAILABLE IN DAMASCUS, SHIHABI SAID THAT THE FIRING INCIDENT WAS SEPARATE EVENT FROM THE BOMBING AND

CONSIDERABLY LESS DRAMATIC THAN VERSION I HAD PRESENTED.

FIRING INCIDENT DID OCCUR NOV 11 BUT ON HIGHWAY OUT TO AIRPORT NOT ON THE DAMASCUS-MEZZE ROAD. IT INVOLVED A SMALL GROUP OF SYRIAN MILITARY STATIONED AT DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT FOR PERIMETER SECURITY. THESE SOLDIERS HAD LEFT THEIR POSTS AFTER DARK TO INVESTIGATE SUSPICIOUS NOISES IN NEARBY FRUIT ORCHARDS. (NOISES HAD BEEN APPARENTLY CAUSED BY NEARBY RESIDENTS STEALING FRUIT.) SOLDIERS WERE STARTLED BY CAR STOPPING ON AIRPORT ROAD WHOSE DRIVER

MADE, THEY SAY, SUSPICIOUS SIGNAL. SOLDIERS OPENED FIRE WOUNDING TWO PASSENGERS IN CAR. SOLDIERS NOW UNDER ARREST AND UNDERGOING INVESTIGATION.

4. CONCERNING THE BOMBING ITSELF, SHIHABI SAID THAT SARG'S EARLIER HYPOTHESES THAT JABRIL'S PFLP-GC AND SUBSEQUENTLY THAT HABASH' PFLP HAD BEEN BEHIND THE WAVE OF BOMBINGS HAS NOW BEEN DISCARDED.

EVIDENCE APPEARS TO POINT TO SPONSORSHIP BY IRAQI GOVERNMENT AT LEVEL OF SADDAM HUSSEIN, WORKING THROUGH INDIVIDUAL PALESTINIAN DISSENTERS SUCH AS ABU NIDAL (SABRI AL-BANNA). SARG NOW HAS UNDER INTERROGATION SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS SUSPECTED OF LINKS TO BAGHDAD IN THIS AFFAIR.

5. SARG ALSO STRONGLY SUSPECTS IRAQI SPONSORSHIP OF LATEST HIJACKING OF BRITISH AIRCRAFT IN TUNIS.

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6. COMMENT: AS NOTED ABOVE, SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE HAS BEEN COMING UP WITH VARIETY OF GUILTY PARTIES OVER RECENT MONTHS IN CONNECTION WITH THE DAMASCUS-ALEPPO BOMBINGS. LACKING INDEPENDENT ACCESS TO EVIDENCE, WE ARE UNABLE TO SAY AT THIS POINT WHETHER THIS LATEST HYPOTHESIS OF IRAQI INVOLVEMENT SHOULD BE TAKEN AS CONCLUSIVE. MURPHY UNQUOTE INGERSOLL

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